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Tod Munn is a bully. He's tough, but times are even tougher. The wimps have stopped coughing up their lunch money. The administration is cracking down. Then to make things worse, Tod and his friends get busted doing something bad. Something *really* bad.

Lucky Tod must spend his daily detention in a hot, empty room with Mrs. Woodrow, a no-nonsense guidance counselor. He doesn't know why he's there, but she does. Tod's punishment: to scrawl his story in a beat-up notebook. He can be painfully funny and he can be brutally honest. But can Mrs. Woodrow help Tod stop playing the bad guy before he actually turns into one . . . for real?

Read Tod's notebook for yourself.

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Scrawl Details

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Author : Mark Shulman

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From Reader Review Scrawl for online ebook

Ashley Lynne says

I actually feel kind of bad for giving this book 2 stars. Everyone else who's read this book seems to love it. I thought it was mediocre. It was interesting enough that I wanted to finish it, but not so fantastically amazing that I just couldn't put it down.

Things I liked about this book:

I liked the style in which this book is written. It's not formal writing. It's all a "journal" from a high school bully kid, so it's not written like a typical fiction novel. I also thought the narrator - the high school bully - was very funny sometimes. A quote that literally made me lol:

"Next class was Art class. I was supposed to be drawing a bird. Any kind of bird. The only birds I know are the pigeon, the chicken, and the middle finger."

There are a few moments like that one that made me laugh. But other than that, nothing about this book was especially interesting.

Things I didn't like about this book:

Usually I can tell when I am going to really enjoy a book because I get sucked in fairly quickly - usually within the first 50 or 60 pages. That didn't happen with this book. I saw the endless positive reviews this book had so I kept thinking "it's gonna get really good really soon" and I spent the entire time reading this book waiting for that to happen. And because it never did happen, this book was a slow read for me. It's the kind of book that, if it interests you, you can breeze through a chapter in a few minutes and before you know it, you're done. However, because it never sucked me in, I couldn't read large portions of this book at once. I'd read 2 to 3 chapters a day, then put it down because I was bored. Because of that, it took me a lot longer to read this book than it should have. I could've gotten through this book in a day and a half, considering I was busy most of the day on the day I picked this up. And the last thing I didn't like about this book is that I never really grew to like any of the characters, even the main character/narrator. Usually the main character is a person who you like from the beginning because they're the good guy, or they are the bad guy, but they grow on you and you empathize with them after you learn about their hard lives and whatnot. The main character in this book is an underprivileged kid who is a lot smarter and talented than he lets people think. Normally, I would've felt sympathy for that kind of character. But something about this kid made me indifferent. Also, I was expecting the main character to experience a lot of emotional and mental growth by the end of the book, but I found the character fell short in that area.

Overall, this was an extremely mediocre book, in my opinion. Nothing special, new, unique, different, or ahead of its time in this one. To be completely honest, the only thing that really encouraged me to finish this book [I almost gave up about 70% of the way through] is knowing it'd be one more book to add to my reading challenge.

Carolina says

Here's the thing about this book: I sort of didn't want to like it. It's about--and written in the voice of--a bully. And I can't abide a bully. So, I didn't want to sympathize with one. I certainly didn't want to like one. But you know, through the course of reading SCRAWL, I did both of those things. Something else happened too: I began to understand Tod.

But Tod isn't your average ham-fisted, blockheaded bully either. He's intelligent, clever, and ridiculously funny. His drip-dry humor was just the sort I usually go for. His voice steals the show and had me turning pages just to see what he would say next. Knocked my slippers off to read him and the way he approached the universe (the writing is quite sharp as well). But it really saddened me, too, because in seeing his sarcasm and his self-deprecation, you also see his unflinching inward look at the ugly reality that is his life. SCRAWL is a vivid portrayal of the ways in which environment can affect more than just a person's ability to feed and clothe himself. You see how deprivation, poverty and neglect affect more than just the physicality of a person.

It's easy to vilify a bully, I guess. Certainly, they're bullies and awful and their behavior shouldn't be tolerated. EVER. But SCRAWL doesn't ask us to tolerate the behavior. It merely says look twice and try to get an idea of why. In reading the story of this particular bully, a person who is clearly not evil or malicious--merely a survivor (and SCRAWL seems to make a distinction)--you can't help but feel hopeful. Because if you understand the why, you might stand a chance at not only protecting the victims of bullying, but maybe also save the bully (and in turn, all potential future victims). In reading the entries from Tod's journal, I felt this blooming sense of surprise. For one, it had me cracking up. Seriously funny stuff--I was so taken by the voice. But also, I was starting to really root for him. Though I cringed at those moments where he would relapse and be an arse, I felt a need to cheer when he would rebound and take a few more baby steps forward. Even though he's telling the story, Tod himself didn't seem to be able to see how his life was changing through the pages of his journal, but the teacher--and the reader--clearly do. And you can't help but hope hope hope that he'll progress and change and become a better person, even though you know his life's not going to miraculously change.

But SCRAWL isn't just a journal. Not only does it not really read like one, it's an actual narrative complete with dialogue that unfolds in a serial way, headlined by the date. But it's not just Tod's story either. Certainly, he's the star and anti-star of the show--you see his triumphs as well as his weaknesses, his flaws, and his seriously poor choices. But through his eyes and a few conspicuous notes jotted down in the "margins" of the book, you also get to see the teacher that has forced him to keep up this journal in detention. In this way, you begin to see the power of a little attention, care and affection. Through a few secondary characters within Tod's story, you also get to see the transformative powers of love (or something kind of like it) and friendship. So, while SCRAWL is a funny, poignant, sometimes really sad story of a bully; it's ultimately the understated story of a bully's redemption--and a story of hope.

Lanica says

I loved everything about this book. It had a unique perspective, an unusual protagonist, an interesting format and it was not the same 'message' that kids get beat over the head with in so many YA books.

I would love to have a book club read this and hear how students react to the characters and the situations. I'd especially be interested to see how boys react to it. I am sure to order this book for any library I work in in the future.

I listened to this on audio book and there were a few moments when I really wished I had the paper copy in my hands. I want to see how the pages look...I recommend reading this in paper form if at all possible; however, the narrator was very good and if it weren't for the odd sequencing of a few of the pages I'd not mention it at all. If audio book is your only option - it's still an excellent choice.

Joe Slager says

This shows a boy who got in trouble for littering and vandalizing and has to face the storm. His detention teacher is caring, helpful, and understanding. he must sit in a classroom for three months, and write in his notebook. This was a great way to reveal character traits about the main character. Anyway, the book shows life lessons, and how people should always have someone that cares about them.

Sarah says

One word: AMAZING. The first thing I noticed was the voice in the book. The book is composed of Tod's "Detention Journal" entries - he has to write in this journal during detention for getting in trouble. It is evident that this author knows a thing or two about character development; the voice is so strong, you feel like you've known Tod for all your life. I wasn't planning on read this 200-something page book in one sitting because of only an hour of time to do it in, but it ended up that way. You get so caught up in Tod's world: his feelings, his emotion, his sense of subtle humor, that suddenly you forget that you need to be somewhere or do something. About three pages into the book I had to use the restroom. I couldn't put the book down or even get up from my seat I was so engrossed, and when I finished the book - about two hours later - you would have thought a murderer was chasing me because I ran so fast to the restroom. Definately something to read, and though it's directed towards youth, I think anyone could get caught up in the emotions of Tod.

Brad says

Here's the executive summary of this post: "Scrawl" reveals the inner life of a junior high school bully, a huge, violent, lower class, shambling boy named Tod Munn who is secretly brilliant but plays being an oaf to conceal his intelligence and retain his hidden-in-plain-sight status in the complex social economy of his school. We have so many books about the inner lives of girls or super-powered boys or just good-looking, well-intentioned kids who wind up in bad situations that it's refreshing to read a novel that plumbs the personality of somebody who is trapped and has given up on himself and everyone around him. Shulman writes beautifully and keeps the book from turning into an ABC After School Special (they don't even make those anymore, do they?) exercise in sentimentality. This is a terrific read for anybody, particularly if you like Young Adult (YA) fiction, from a small press with a small marketing budget. You're only likely to hear about it by word of mouth, and my mouth is telling you to go buy it on Amazon or order it from your local bookstore.

The longer version: If you're a Calvin & Hobbes fan like I am, then you might share my mental picture of

Tod, which is Moe the elementary school bully.

A few years older and infinitely smarter than Moe, Tod lives with his mom, a seamstress at a downtown dry cleaner, and his stepfather Dick, a gardener, who thinks as little of Tod as he has to say to him, which is mostly "keep it down in there." Tod's dad walked out of his life when he was a kid leaving behind only an apology letter that Tod hides in a suitcase under his bed. Poor, sleeping in an under-heated room in a rough-Manhattan-neighborhood apartment with paper thin walls and so little food that he eats both breakfast and lunch at the school cafeteria, Tod is a loser and knows it. He has two companions -- not exactly friends so he calls them his "droogs" -- named Rob and Rex, as well as a younger friend who he looks after on the sly named Bernie. Just about everybody is taken in by Tod's tough guy persona -- even the teachers who can't reconcile his appearance and manner with his high grades -- with the possible exception of Stu, a classmate of Tod's who is blind.

The engine for the novel: Tod is in detention, having been caught doing something we don't learn about until later and sentenced to a month with Mrs. Woodrow, the school guidance counselor, who makes him keep a journal after school every day while Rex and Rod, Tod's co-conspirators, clean the school grounds in the freezing cold as their punishment. Being forced to write uncorks something in Tod, and despite his desire to remain invisible he finds himself describing the school, his home, his life and his lack of options all in arresting detail. From time to time, Mrs. Woodrow writes back to Tod, and it feels like the voice of God when that adult voice writing in italics interjects. As his perspective shifts due to his journaling, Tod's school and home life also begin to open, although there are no scholarships to private school for THIS kid.

Shulman writes first person in Tod's voice, and for the literary-critically minded of you the book is an exercise in "the skaz," a Russian Formalist term that describes when a tale is told convincingly and unerringly from a character's unusual perspective. The most famous American example of the skaz is Twain's "Huckleberry Finn." Just about the only challenge of reading this delightful book is reconciling Tod's appearance with his vocabulary and intelligence, and that's a neat trick on Shulman's part since we only have Tod's own narrative to convince us of his appearance.

Here's the opening paragraph from "Scrawl":

"Think about a pair of glasses for a second. You see them every day but you really don't think about them, I bet. They're just glass and metal, or glass and plastic. Little pieces of glass stuck on your face that mean everything. Maybe they mean you're smart. Maybe they mean you're rich. But definitely they mean you can't see without them. Grind the glass this way, put in a slight curve, and you can see far. Change that curve a hair, just a tiny, minuscule difference, and you can see near. Grab the two lenses between your big hands and twist your wrist -- just SNAP the part over the nose -- now you can't see anything for the rest of the day. That's how it went for fat Ricardo Manzana."

What I like so much about that paragraph is that it starts with a typical writerly observation and then stomps right into Tod's hulk persona. Shulman stops the reader from seeing through the lenses and makes us feel with Tod's hands. That's a neat trick.

Most teenagers feel isolated, misunderstood and powerless. The few that don't are those kids who tragically peak in high school and get to be disappointed with the next sixty or eighty years of life. Tod Munn IS isolated, misunderstood and -- despite his physical strength and intelligence-- powerless. His story is well worth reading.

Catie says

Well, if you're looking to get deep into the mind of a bully, this ain't it. (Go check out Courtney Summers instead.) That's because Tod Munn isn't *really* a bully. Or if he is, he's a rather benevolent one. He's also on the honor roll, has perfect attendance, and is a pretty talented seamstress (seamster?). He's well-read, a fantastic speller, and doesn't use drugs or drink or even swear.

And okay, yes, this book is written as a series of journal entries from Tod to his guidance counselor so maybe he's heavily editing/putting a good spin on his own behavior. But I just never got that impression. Even when Tod begins writing in his own private notebook, the journal entries don't become any more explicit. I never felt like he was lying to me...and I love narrators that lie to me.

However, for what this is – essentially the story of a good kid, forced to deal with poverty, absent parents, and teachers who've labeled him the bad kid – it's an enjoyable read. It's very rewarding to see Tod discover writing as both a release and a way to examine his own life and try to make it better.

I grew up in similar circumstances as this main character. I can still remember clearly all the mortification that I felt at being poor, using free lunch tickets, having no clothes to wear, no food at home, no parents. I remember shame, selfish desperation, and learned resourcefulness. Unfortunately, this book did not make me recall any of those feelings. In one way I am thankful for that, because I don't enjoy reliving those memories. But this book would have earned more of my respect if it had challenged me.

Everything here feels toned down and oversimplified. Tod's home life seems hard, but then much of it is explained away. His bullying, rather tame to begin with, is brushed aside with "mitigating" factors. In fact, Tod isn't even the real bully...he's the victim! Of course. The ending is just ridiculous. Tod takes almost no responsibility for anything that he's done, but when the *real* bully is finally revealed, no consideration is given to his/her mitigating circumstances. He/she is just plain mean. So yes...let's all take a walk in Tod's shoes and understand just where he's coming from...but everyone else? Nah.

Perfect Musical Pairing

Queen – Under Pressure

This song makes me feel all the emotion about poverty, hunger, and compassion that I think this book is lacking. Put it on after finishing this book if you feel the same way! Or, you could just play it right now...because Queen is one of the greatest bands of all time. You're welcome.

Also seen on The Readventurer.

Brooke says

I think that this book is an excellent perceived view of a school from a teen bully. He may be a bully, but all that he has said about his grades give me the impression that he means to be tough on the outside but he secretly even says that he studies hard to meet his goals to get good grades. He crumples his papers before he turns them in, plays stupid or coy in class(Tod Munn is in all reading honors classes)while still being top person in class. His teachers do everything they can underhanded to keep him out of their precious spelling

bee, but he does manage to end up IN the spelling bee anyways. He is up to the finals with one of his arch enemies Greg, and when Greg stumbles upon a word (it is obvious that the Teachers are rooting for him) and spells jewelry wrong, they accept it because it was the correct way in the England. Tod is peeved by this but purposely fails for the sake of his favorite teacher, Mr. Harmon. He accepts his certificate and walks off stage. This boook is truly enjoyable, and everone should read it if the time is possible.

Linda Bell says

I didn't know what to think when I opened up this book. I've seen reviews that it's a great great book and I've seen some which say it lacks a plot, or that it's been done before.

Now I've read Scrawl for myself. I am firmly of the belief that it IS a great, great book.

To the readers who must have spies and explosions and palace intrigue: they're here in this book. They're just realistic.

To the readers who say it's been done before: it's true. A boy makes the hero's journey from slacker loser to beginning to become *somebody* and it is at a loss to everything he's been up to that point. He is willing to challenge and lose everything important to him for the one shining grail that has become more important, and more reflective of who he really is. That is, once he starts to figure it out.

Yes, it's been done before. And rarely as well as this.

To the readers who want an original story: it's here:

>>SPOILER PARAGRAPH<<

An oversized bully eventually sets his sights on sewing costumes for the school play, and uses his wiles as a thief and con man to acquire them, and sew them himself. Seriously, have you seen that before.

>>END OF SPOILER<<

I've read every single review here on Goodreads about this book, fascinated at the rohshach test some books can be. People who like fantasy fiction don't seem able or willing to appreciate its subtleties -- the way the ending only hints that he's killed the beast, rather than his having washed his hands in its blood. On the other hand, people who like real-life stories absolutely love Scrawl.

Just let go and trust in this remarkable young author. He is taking you on a trip through real life -- someone's real life - and he is making it very, very memorable indeed.

Natalie says

An amazing novel that is a page turner you will never forget. In the novel Scrawl written by Mark Shulman it is a book that would be leaving you with so many questions. Tod is a person who you might think as a "thug" or a "troublemaker" but in reality he is a person worth being friends with. He may not be the most innocent person in the past but he is a person you could trust, a real friend. Tod, just figures out who is really there for

him. I suggest this novel to readers who love the genre of realistic fiction.

Nickie says

Scrawl's protagonist is not a nice guy. In fact, high schooler Tod Munn is a barely tolerable guy. In between stealing lunch money, vandalizing school property, and irritating teachers, Tod finally pushes his luck and gets into major trouble.

Instead of being expelled, Tod is sentenced to a few months of detention supervised by his guidance counselor. Mrs. Woodrow requires Tod to write in a journal, and what she discovers about Tod and his friends surprises everyone...

What I liked about this book:

In a word: Tod. Shulman created a rich, believable character, and I think I liked Tod more precisely because he is unlikeable. His journal entries are laugh-out-loud funny, and Tod finds ways to justify all of his behavior.

Through Tod's journal entries, we see an intelligent kid who is consistently written off by teachers for being obnoxious. We see a boy who can be a caring friend (to longtime buddy Bernie) or can be a nightmare (to anyone who talks down to him).

We see a kid who falls to the expectation that teachers set for him, and rises to the challenge that one of his peers sets before him.

We see a smart-ass. And as my dad always said: "You have to be smart to be a smart-ass".

What I didn't like about this book:

I was a bit wishy-washy on the ending. Tod seems to subscribe to the 'snitches get stitches' school of thought, and through the whole story refuses to squeal on his buddies. At the end of the book, he changes his mind and tells his counselor about his misdeeds, naming any friends that are complicit. Shulman hints at what makes Tod change his mind, but I think the ending would have felt more authentic if the reader could see a bit more of Tod's thoughts and why he changed his mind.

Final verdict:

Loved it. When browsing the library, I feel like there are so many more YA stories with female protags than males. This one was a nice change of pace, and handles the harsh realities of high school, friendships, and life beautifully. Check it out!

Hadiyah says

That was amazing! I loved it! I love those books that are a bit confusing and then they make PERFECT sense in the end.

The characters were amazing. Honestly. I LOVED Tod (aka Pops), Doug (aka Bernie) and Mrs. Woodrow. I hated everyone else, but they were really good characters written into the book. Everyone else that treated Tod like crap. All those sucky people that set him up and treated him like a worthless sack of trash. Just...

ugh. It's frustrating.

I also love the way this book was written... From Tod's point of view in his detention notebook (it's not a journal, as he would tell Mrs. W). Amazing.

Katie Larson says

My overall thoughts from the book were positive. I think that although the book did not end with Tod becoming a better person I believe that the book gave us the ending we did not want but the ending that we needed. People do not change easily and it takes a lot of work. Tod did not change because he did not want to change. You can lead a horse to water but you cannot force it to drink. This is exactly what happened in Scrawl. Ms. Woodrow tried her best to help Tod but at the end of the day it is all up to Tod on how he behaves. I loved how she showed up to his house. This showed that she truly cares about him and his success. She went out of her way for him. I hope there will be a sequel in the future but even if there is not you can make up a story to continue the book. If you also want a better ending you should try and rewrite it! I think that is a fun way to make the book end in a positive light. Nothing really surprised me as the book came to an end since that is the way life works. We can hope for something but reality will always be there to keep us in check. Tod talked about his home life and not being able to afford food. He takes the money from the kids who are wealthier than him so he can afford food. Tod even stated, "who else is stealing money from my wimpy rich kids?" After reading this I came to understand how rough Tod has it back at home. His father is not in the picture anymore and his mother cannot seem to get enough food for him. Tod is trying to take control in every situation because he is the only person he thinks he can rely on. It is important to remember that people like Tod may have a difficult home life. Everyone goes through difficult problems in life but you should always know that by talking to others and asking for help you can improve any problem. My advice for Tod and you would be to never be afraid to open up to others. Many are going through the same struggles. There are people who have been there before and can help you to conquer anything. Since you think Tod is now a different person now than the person he was at the start of the book how can you tell? What actions are different from beginning Tod to the Tod we know now? Today in class in our groups we talked about what we thought the theme and topics were from the book. Together we came up with the information below. What do you think the theme and topics are from Scrawl?

Theme: self identity

I see this as the theme because it shows how Tod acts overall throughout the book

Topics under that theme: friendship, trust, rules

-friendship: how Tod interacts with his peers. What relationships does he have with those he sees as weak targets? How does he interact with Lux?

-Trust: throughout his journal writings Tod has opened up about issues within his household. He trusts Ms. Woodrow to know all of the deep things from his life.

-Rules: How does Tod follow the rules within his household, school community, and his rules he sets for himself?

Kate says

It's tough to know where to start with this one... the pitch-perfect, sharp-edged smart-kid-bad-kid voice? The creative and believable "detention notebook" format, complete with quick exchanges between the kid doing time and the teacher-warden? Loved all that...but I think it's the heart of this book that really drew me in

(author Mark Shulman might hate that I said that...he's one of those tough guys who probably eats books with "heart" for breakfast, but it's true.) The truth is that Tod, the main character and narrator of SCRAWL, is a kid I've taught in my classroom so many times I've lost count - he's smart, funny, defiant, impulsive, and living in a world that so many more privileged kids (and teachers) will never really understand. And he's wonderful.

Read this one - you'll be so glad you did - and then pass it on to any of your reluctant readers. Note for teachers: while it's aimed at the high school crowd, there's nothing in it that would keep me from sharing this one with my 7th graders. Highly recommended.

Nancy says

SCRAWL is a fabulous, riveting read. Tod is probably the most interesting bad boy I've ever met in YA fiction, and Mark Shulman is certainly one of the best new voices.
